

Montpelier Depot
Montpelier Station
Orange County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-997

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MONTPELIER DEPOT

HABS No. VA-997

Location: Montpelier Station, Orange County,
Virginia
U.T.M. Coordinates: 17/747112/4234699
(Gordonsville Quadrangle, Virginia)

Present Owner: Mrs. Marion duPont Scott

Present Occupant: The United States Postal Service

Present Use: Post Office

Statement of Significance: The old Southern Railroad
depot located at Montpelier Station,
Virginia is an important, and presently
beautifully preserved, example of those
depots built by the Southern Railroad
Company at the turn of the century in
the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Historical Significance

A. Physical History

1. The depot was constructed on approximately one and one half acres located across from State Route 20 and its intersection with Orange County Road 639, and adjacent to the main entrance gate of the estate known as "Montpelier". Immediately to the rear of the depot are located the tracks of the Southern Railroad Company.
2. Construction of the Building
The depot was built in 1910, according to the stock plans drawn up by the Southern Railroad company's engineering department. The present building varies in certain aspects, which can be seen by comparing the original plans in the appendix with the H.A.B.S. drawings. The depot was built with the overall dimensions of 51'6" x 24'8 3/4"

3. Architect/Builders

The designers of the structure were members of the Engineering department of the Southern Railroad Company in Washington, the District of Columbia. The builders of the depot were the employees of the estate known as "Montpelier".

4. Alterations and additions

The structure remains to this day essentially as it was constructed in 1910. Its original tile roof was removed and replaced with cedar shingles in 1924. In turn this roofing was removed recently in 1961 and replaced with the present flat tin roof with raised seam. The tin roof was not painted. The postal area was enlarged in 1929 when passenger service was discontinued. The exterior entrance to the post office, which was originally on the street front, was sealed and left as a window with horizontal iron bars placed across it. On the interior the postal patrons' boxes were built into the west wall of the "colored" waiting room which in turn became the Post Office lobby. The last occupants of the apartments on the depot's second floor vacated the premises in 1950. No one has lived there since. At no time since the depot was built was plumbing of any type added. The privy was and still is located opposite the depot across State Route 20.

5. Historical Significance and Persons Connected with the Structure

1. Although the depot was only built in 1910, its affiliation with the estate of "Montpelier" brings it a special notoriety. "Montpelier" was built by the father of James Madison, the fourth President of the United States, and was worked on by various Monticello craftsmen. In 1901 the estate was purchased by William duPont of Wilmington, Delaware. When Mr. duPont purchased the house and its 1,400 acres he immediately instigated two far reaching changes. He added two large flanking wings to the Madison block of the main house, and brought the railroad through his estate. The Southern Railroad Company bought a right of way through Mr. duPont's property for track connecting nearby Orange with Charlottesville to the southwest. This right of way was granted providing that the Railroad make available plans for a depot and schedule passenger and freight stops at the depot. The first passenger service began in 1912 and was stopped in 1929. Freight service began in 1911 and was discontinued in 1962. Since its construction in 1910 the Montpelier depot has remained in the possession of Mr. duPont's heirs.

4. Chimneys

The bell caste roof is pierced by two chimneys located on the hip of the roof on the east end and just off the center of the hip. The eastern chimney has two flues each servicing a wood burning stove located on the common wall separating the "colored" waiting room from the "white". The other chimney services the station master's office on the main floor and accommodated the wood burning stove located there. There is evidence that this chimney also served as a common flue for three small stoves in the western, and two central rooms, facing north and south respectively, on the second floor. There are cement hearths in each room and three capped round openings in the respective sides of the chimney.

5. Openings

a. Doorways/Doors

The street front is divided into five bays, two of which permit access; one for pedestrians, the other for freight. The pedestrian access portal is protected by a single hung door with the advantage of a vertically arranged six panes of glass permitting some light into an otherwise dark stairhall. The lower half of the door is embellished with two recessed rectangular panels. The brass is the original hardware, the screen door was added in the 1950's. The freight door is a singularly large (7'x8') sliding door, which, when opened, slides to the left behind the exterior wall. The door sports four rectangular recessed panels, the top being larger than the bottom. The freight access doors on the south facade are duplicates of the one previously described, except that the freight door on the basement level is smaller (7'x7') and both doors on the south side slide to the right. The remaining two access portals are located on the east side of the depot. They flank the only window on that side and open directly into the "white" and "colored" waiting rooms respectively. Each door is crowned with a transom window. The doors are both embellished with five rectangular recessed panels arranged one above the other. The brass is the original stock.

b. Windows

On the first floor all of our windows are of the same dimensions (6'9"x2'9"). They are of the double hung variety with a six over six arrangement. The windows located in the dormers are all of the same dimensions (4'5"x2'9") and are double hung. They all enjoy the gay distinction of sporting diamond panes of the eclectic style. All the windows in the depot are original, as are their sills, sashes, heads, and jambs. There have never been, nor are there now, either interior or exterior shutters.

6. Roof

The bell caste roof of the depot is covered in tin panels with raised seams. The tin is not painted a particular color.

7. Porch Flooring

The veranda surrounding three sides of the depot is protected by the roof's overhang. On the north and west sides the flooring is of wood, on the east it is of poured in place concrete. The track facade of the walkway is of poured in place concrete. The depot sits 53' back from the track to the cement walk. The space in between was covered in crushed rock and gravel.

C. Interior Description

1. Floor Plans

- a. Only a part of the foundation space is accessible, the remaining space being merely crawl space. Access can be obtained through the freight door located on the basement level on the track facade. The freight loading room on this level is 11'2"x 21'10".

b. First Floor

On the first floor are located two waiting rooms, fronting the southeast and northeast respectively. The southeast room being the "white waiting room" is the larger of the two. This room retains all its original furniture and is lit by windows on the east and south walls. Both rooms can be reached from exterior access portals located on the east wall, but only the larger room has an access portal on the west wall opening directly into the station master's office and the rest

of the building's interior space. The central space is divided into two designated areas. The larger area or station master's office has a large alcove, made up of four windows, overlooking the train approaches to the depot. This area was designated for the use of the station master. It provided space for the sale of train tickets, receiving and transmitting telegraph messages, as well as office space. The room was and is presently partitioned with a wire mesh screen, bolted to the ceiling and floor. The screen secures the Postal area, and enclosed all the facilities for tending the mails. There is no access portal to this area from the exterior. This central space can be entered on the east wall by the previously mentioned door from the "white" waiting room. It can also be reached by a door on the southwest wall from the freight room, and on the northwest wall from the stairhall. All three rooms are completely finished in wood with wainscot. The trim is all varnished and the rest is painted. The freight room is located on the west side of the building and runs the entire width of the building. It is an unfinished room lit by one single window on the west wall. The freight door on the south wall has been permanently sealed, access can be gained from the tracks via a freight elevator located in the south west corner of the room and by a freight door located on the north wall. This room was never heated. Situated between the freight room and the Post Office is a stair hall which can be reached by the pedestrian access portal on the north facade and by the north west door from the Postal area. This stair hall provides access to the four room apartment on the second floor. Upon reaching the top landing of the stairs to the right or west is a door opening directly into a singular lit by a dormer of two windows, the slope of the roof is apparent and meets the wall five feet from the floor. The room is finished in wood painted white. There is a cement hearth in the center of the east wall which indicates a wood burning stove, as there is a round capped hole in the wall directly above the slab for a flue leading to the chimney across the hall. Directly across the stair

landing is located another door which opens directly into the remaining suite of three rooms. This central room faces south and enjoys a dormered alcove composed of four windows. The brick chimney is located in the north west corner of the room which is a cement slab as a hearth. There are two other doors located respectively in the northeast and west walls of the room. The room directly to the north of it shares the chimney located in its southwest corner and is lit by a dormer of two windows. On the west and east walls are two crawl spaces for storage. The eastern room is not unlike the western room in size except that it was not heated by a stove but merely has the eastern chimney shaft rising through it as a source of warmth. It is lit by a dormer of two windows. The three rooms are finished in wood and painted. The wood burning stoves were removed following the second world war and a new oil burning furnace has been installed in the postal area in 1958. Running water has never been installed.

Project Information

This class project was undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture, measured and drawn in the Fall Semester 1977 by Margaret W. Hilliard and Gray MackW. Bryan, III. This documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey, but was neither produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by HABS staff members.

ADDENDUM TO:
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Montpelier Station
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